

Ready for his “overnight success” tour

Troubadour Texas spotlight opened the door for Zane Williams
by Dana Jones

IT'S 5:15 P.M. ON A TUESDAY NIGHT. PEOPLE are already arriving. It is singer/songwriter night, and Zane Williams is the artist. It will be very crowded.

Williams soon enters. He's carrying a guitar, greeting staff and probably notices the tables are already full. He needs to sound check, but sets down his guitar and goes table to table. He smiles, greets, hugs, poses for photos, and ensures everyone knows he is glad to have them there.

As the room fills to standing room only, the crowd's diversity becomes very apparent. An older gentleman with a small table near the front allows a 9 year-old star struck fan to have his other seat so she can see. These fans are from many walks of life. There are singles, couples, and families with children, including Williams' own wife Jodi and young son, Buck. Williams' parents and in-laws are here, too.

It's another stop on what's being called his “Overnight Success” tour. It's a tour that's been years in the making.

Williams left Texas after graduation from Abilene Christian University, heading to Nashville to pursue the dream of making a living as a songwriter. He paid his dues there, nine years of them. He decided it was time to move back home to Texas, and it was then that things began to change.

A local DJ heard Williams at his first open mic night, and began playing him on the radio.

Texas music artists took notice of him, and began encouraging other venues and artists to include him. His Texas fan base grew rapidly, his calendar began to fill, and he was gaining radio airplay and gigs. It helped when Jason Michael Carroll recorded Williams' “Hurry Home” in 2010, it climbed to #15 on the charts, with heavy video play on CMT and GAC. Williams debuted on the Texas Music charts with “Ride With Me,” the title track from his 2011 CD release.

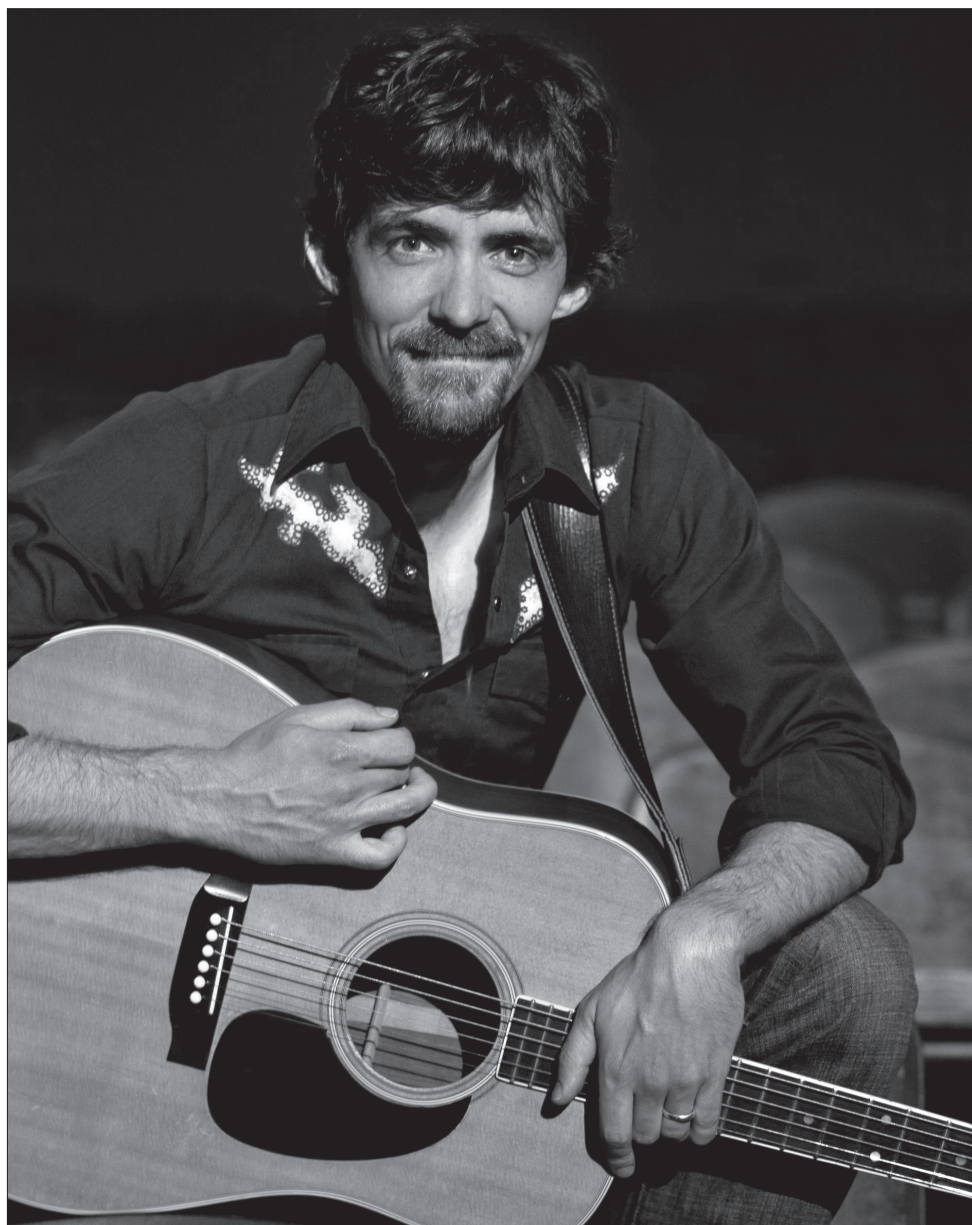
Lucky break

WILLIAMS SAYS HIS TRULY “lucky break” happened with *Troubadour Texas*, a TV show about up and coming Texas singer/songwriters. One of the producers came to a local appearance and asked if he wanted to try out. Williams was exactly what they were looking for, and he quickly became featured weekly.

It led to making commercials, in-store appearances, more gigs, trips on a tour bus, and getting signed with BE Music, a sister company of *Troubadour Texas*. In April of 2012, he was touring France. In August, he was opening for Alan Jackson to a crowd of 5000 in Kansas.

But this night, he's home.

It's a noisy venue; the talkers are toward the back of the room.



He and wife Jodi are expecting an addition to the family around Thanksgiving : Zane Williams

“I love the Texas market. The main quality for Texas music is not specifically bluegrass, rock, country, folk. Being genuine and having an independent spirit is the unifying factor. It's unpretentious, and I really feel like I fit in that category. Texas music is heart-felt, and well written. It can cross genres. It makes me feel good to meet a new fan who says ‘hey, yours is the first country CD I've ever bought.’”

—ZANE WILLIAMS

Williams doesn't seem to mind, he plays to those listening. There are plenty. They hang on his every word.

Williams has a knack for gauging his crowd. Tonight is no exception. It's a perfect blend of storytelling, sing-a-long, love and lore. There are many of this packed in, diverse crowd singing along to all of Williams' songs. Whether old favorites or brand new, his fans know and love his music.

Family

ONE OF HIS SONGS GETS the audience quiet. It's a crowd favorite “99 Bottles,” most usually many sing along. This time, it's a duet. It's Williams, accompanied by his toddler son, Buck. Even the talkers get quiet as they listen to father and son singing and smiling together. Mom Jodi smiles sweetly as they sing. They finish, the crowd wildly applauds. Buck smiles, and decides he should do the rest of the gig with his dad. But it's getting late, time for the little partner to head

home with mom, much to his chagrin.

Part of Williams' appeal to fans is his devotion to his family. He makes them a priority, and isn't bashful about it. On the day of his latest single “Sure Felt Like Goodbye” being released, Williams was rearranging and getting the nursery ready for their new baby. Slated to arrive at Thanksgiving, the Williams family will welcome a little girl, to be named Gentry, into their close knit family.

Why and how does a happy family man write sad songs? Williams says, “If I wrote only the great, happy stuff, it would be boring. I like to step back and play a role to write a song. In “Sure Felt Like Goodbye” the chorus just popped, and I wrote from there. It would be hard to write a break-up or cheating song with my current life. But I can draw from others, like my days at the Bluebird, remembering how people were often in emotional relationship turmoil. I always wondered if it was the artist

in them, or if they really enjoyed the drama. I remember speaking with a singer/songwriter in his mid 50's talking about breaking up with his girlfriend, almost sounding like a college kid. That's not me, but I can draw from it.”

It's the first release from Williams' latest project, tentatively titled *Overnight Success*, a tongue in cheek title and song from an artist who has been doing this for 12 years. Technically, this will be his eighth CD. He'll tell you rather quickly he's only proud of four of them. It is produced by Williams, along with Luke Wooten and Tom Faulkner. They're in the studio adding finishing touches, working on a special guest appearance, and hoping for release early in 2013. He wrote all the songs, and jokingly he says it will most definitely be a “Zaney” CD. He's excited about this one. “It's going great. It's Nashville quality, but being done at home.” His fans excitedly wait. They are hungry for more.

Williams is, by his own ac-

count, going after the Texas/Red Dirt scene “for real for the first time. This border music was the first scene where I felt like I really belong.” That's why *The Right Place*, Williams' 2009 release, had the state of Texas on the front. “I love the Texas market. The main quality for Texas music is not specifically bluegrass, rock, country, folk. Being genuine and having an independent spirit is the unifying factor. It's unpretentious, and I really feel like I fit in that category. Texas music is heart-felt, and well written. It can cross genres. It makes me feel good to meet a new fan who says ‘hey, yours is the first country CD I've ever bought.’”

Previously, a lack of funds and his strong desire to stay near his family slowed him from pursuing the big dream head on. Now he can. He's very grateful to both BE Music and *Troubadour Texas*. “The encouragement, support, and connections from BE music are really going to allow me to survive this first couple of years. They've done my website, and are basically acting as my label and tour support, which means for the first time I don't have to hold back. And I'm so grateful for the exposure *Troubadour Texas* has given me.”

And whether it's tonight's solo show, or full band outdoors to the masses, it's obvious through the quality of his performance, he's definitely not holding back. He smiles for every picture, signs every CD, and treats each fan as if they are his most important one. He nurtures his fans as much as he does his career. They feel like they are part of his family.

“I'm a 35 year old guy. Aaron Watson and Wade Bowen are doing what I want to do, but they already have 10-15 years under their belts.

“I'm just now getting into the game. I dilly-dallied and was a late bloomer. I didn't know at 20 what I wanted or where I wanted to be. For the first time, I really feel like I'm kicking it into gear. I don't know how big, but 2013 is going to be a big growth year for me. My ducks are in a row for the first time, and I'm going for it. I'm ready for that “overnight success” that's been 12 years in the making.

With the BE Music connections and the *Troubadour Texas* exposure, if I can't make it, I must really suck. You can quote me on that.” ■

Zane Williams is scheduled to perform at Loose Wheels in Denison on November 9, Love and War in Texas Plano on December 1, Love and War Texas Grapevine on December 7 and I Love this Bar Dallas on December 14,